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COMMITTEE ON CONFERENCES
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Agenda item 2 (c) (ii)*

CALENDAR OF CONFERENCES AND MEETINGS: IMPROVED ORGANIZATION OF WORK AND EFFECTIVE USE OF CONFERENCE RESOURCES

Measures to improve the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the use of conference-servicing resources: replies to the Chairman's letter on utilization of conference-servicing resources

Report by the Secretariat

1. In paragraphs 9-12 of its resolution 46/190 of 20 December 1991, the General Assembly:

(a) Requested the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences and the Secretary-General to maintain their contacts with United Nations organs, bringing to their attention ways to ensure the most efficient and effective use of conference services allocated to those organs, including, inter alia, the convening of meetings in a timely manner, rationalizing, to the extent possible, their meeting requirements, as well as monitoring the timely issuance and availability of documentation;

(b) Requested the Committee on Conferences to consider, within its mandate, measures to improve the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the use of conference-servicing resources;

(c) Requested all subsidiary bodies of the General Assembly and of the Economic and Social Council to undertake informal consultations on a regular basis for the purpose of improving the utilization of their conference-servicing resources;

(d) Requested the chairmen of the aforementioned subsidiary bodies to report the results of the consultations to the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences, and the Secretary-General to submit a comprehensive analysis of replies received to the Committee on Conferences.

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* A/AC.172/150/Add.1.

2. In paragraphs 6-8 of its resolution 47/202 A of 22 December 1992, the General Assembly urged all subsidiary bodies of the General Assembly and of the Economic and Social Council to comply with the request of the General Assembly contained in paragraph 11 of resolution 46/190 to undertake informal consultations on a regular basis for the purpose of improving the utilization of their conference-servicing resources; renewed its request contained in paragraph 12 of resolution 46/190 to the chairmen of those subsidiary bodies to report the results of the consultations mentioned in paragraph 6 of resolution 47/202 A to the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences, and requested that Committee to carry out a comprehensive analysis of replies received; and urged the subsidiary bodies of the General Assembly and of the Economic and Social Council, in the context of the required consultations, to evaluate and report on the measures taken, including the convening of meetings in a timely manner, rationalizing their meeting requirements, improving the scheduling of informal consultations, the possibility of biennializing agenda items, and monitoring the timely issuance and availability of documentation.

3. On 30 January 1992 and 25 March 1993, in compliance with the requests of the General Assembly contained in resolutions 46/190 and 47/202 A, as well as with decisions of the Committee on Conferences, the Chairman of the Committee wrote to the chairmen of United Nations bodies. A copy of the letter sent in 1993 is contained in annex I to the present report. Letters were also addressed to the secretaries of United Nations bodies outlining the provisions of resolutions 46/190 and 47/202 on the pattern of conferences and suggesting various steps that could be taken to improve the utilization of conference-servicing resources further.

4. The present paper, submitted in response to the request made to the Committee on Conferences, has been prepared on the basis of informal consultations with, and written replies transmitted by, subsidiary bodies of the General Assembly and of the Economic and Social Council. The annexes to conference room papers A/AC.172/1992/CRP.17 and Add.1, and annex II to the present paper, contain the written replies received in 1992 and 1993, respectively.

I. GENERAL

Guidelines, recommendations and proposals of the Committee on Conferences

5. The bodies consulted generally concurred on the usefulness of the guidelines, recommendations and proposals for improving the utilization of conference-servicing resources drawn up by the Committee on Conferences and transmitted to them by letter. Particular importance was attached to the informal consultations undertaken in accordance with resolutions 46/190 and 47/202. Such consultations were held by a working group or were convened at both the pre-session and in-session stages with a view to organizing the body's work more effectively. The view was also expressed that it would be useful to seek further technical advice from the Office of Conference Services on the availability of conference-servicing facilities and resources before making recommendations on, or adjustments in, the dates and periodicity of future sessions. Lastly, several bodies, including the Special Committee against Apartheid, the Intergovernmental Group to Monitor the Supply and Shipping of Oil

and Petroleum Products to South Africa and the Meeting of the States Parties to the International Convention against Apartheid in Sports, have indicated an increasing awareness of the need to rationalize their work, including the importance of reviewing meeting and documentation requirements. That awareness is further reflected in the numerous resolutions and decisions adopted by subsidiary bodies of the General Assembly and of the Economic and Social Council.

II. MEETINGS

A. Informal meetings and briefings

6. As a rule, the subsidiary bodies consulted referred to the volume of important substantive work carried out in informal meetings which could be more productive than formal sessions on certain matters, particularly complex political and legal issues. The Trade and Development Board of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) held such consultations with the participation of eminent personalities, and these enriched its subsequent discussions considerably. It also held pre-session informal briefings on substantive agenda items, thus assisting delegations in their preparation for the scheduled session, which saved formal meeting time during the session. In addition, savings in some cases resulted from the fact that no specific documentation was required, and summaries, when called for, were prepared informally by the substantive secretariat in one of the working languages of the secretariat, thus reducing demands on the documentation processing services. Several bodies, including the Special Committee against Apartheid and the Meeting of the States Parties to the International Convention against Apartheid in Sports, reported that they had resorted more frequently to informal discussions on questions before them, that is, through the Bureau and a working group, thus resolving disagreements without wasting scheduled meeting time and reducing the need for conference services. The first meeting of the Commission against Apartheid in Sports is invariably unofficial so as to enable members to reach agreement regarding the organization of work and other matters of concern.

B. Scheduling and cancellation of meetings

7. Numerous measures have been adopted by subsidiary bodies with a view to improving scheduling, thus enhancing the utilization of conference-servicing resources. For example, several bodies, including the Governing Council of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Committee on Information, have reduced the duration of their sessions. In addition, efforts have been made to improve the accuracy with which they forecast the number of fully serviced meetings required. The Legal Subcommittee of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space found that the cancellation of scheduled meetings and the convening of working groups in their place have also proved to be useful in general, to reduce the number of plenary meetings, and in particular when certain agenda items were considered. In such cases, the chairman might set a deadline for closing lists of speakers for the general exchange of views and for each of the substantive agenda items. Similarly, if no delegation expressed a wish to speak at the body's next meeting, that meeting might be cancelled and a

working group convened instead. The bodies might also decide as early as possible on the feasibility of cancelling some of their formal meetings in advance in order to hold informal consultations among interested delegations. Moreover, following the example of the Trade and Development Board, evening meetings might be dispensed with, save in very exceptional cases. The Executive Board of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) decided that, to the extent possible, drafting sessions should be scheduled in parallel with meetings of Executive Board committees to avoid night meetings. Lastly, as in the case of the Legal Subcommittee of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, if the time provisionally allocated for the consideration of an agenda item was not fully used or was unlikely to be fully used, the body might, on the basis of consensus, seek to use the time for the consideration of other items or, as the case may be, consider the possibility of concluding the session ahead of the scheduled date.

C. Punctuality and use of time

8. Greater efforts are being made to begin meetings punctually at the scheduled time. Such bodies as the Legal Subcommittee of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space and the Governing Council of UNDP have done so even if there was no quorum. Moreover, the statements made in such bodies as the Trade and Development Board and the Executive Board of UNICEF have been curtailed, thus reducing the length of sessions. The time remaining at the end of scheduled meetings has been used for holding informal consultations to facilitate general agreement on matters at hand.

III. CONTROL AND LIMITATION OF DOCUMENTATION

A. Rationalization

9. On the basis of the replies received and the informal consultations held, it is clear that subsidiary bodies continue to attach importance to measures to control and limit the volume of documentation. The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People referred to the efforts made to ensure the timely and orderly submission of its pre-session documentation. The Centre against Apartheid has made efforts to streamline the documentation of the United Nations bodies serviced by it. Similar efforts were reported by the Governing Council of UNDP. Moreover, the Trade and Development Board, the Commission on Science and Technology for Development and the Executive Board of UNICEF expressed their intention of ensuring compliance with the six-week rule for the distribution of documentation and the rules concerning the length of written reports. They referred to their ongoing efforts to reduce documentation to a minimum, including, in the case of the Trade and Development Board, recourse to photocopied texts in one language only. None the less, the Executive Board of UNICEF, while making efforts to reduce the volume of documentation, noted that its members continued to request too many reports.

10. Regarding documents annexed to reports, the Legal Subcommittee of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space decided that a document would usually be annexed only once, if at all, to the report of the session at which it was first submitted, but not to subsequent reports.

11. Various other measures taken to reduce the volume of documentation may be appropriate for subsidiary bodies as a whole. As in the case of the Executive Board of UNICEF, the list of documents requested for future meetings might be reviewed with a view to rationalizing it, efforts might be made to prepare shorter and more focused documentation, and to the extent possible, regular reporting might be carried out on a biennial or triennial basis.

B. Written reports

12. In recent years there has been a trend towards closer adherence to the 32-page limit for reports, owing, inter alia, to increased awareness of the relevant resolutions, monitoring and information disseminated by the Committee on Conferences and growing concern about the expense involved in producing reports, particularly at a time of financial stringency. Nevertheless, some bodies have exceeded that limit because of the nature of their work. For example, some reports, particularly those of legal bodies and committees that generate large numbers of draft resolutions, could not reasonably be confined to 32 pages. Subsidiary organs, after all, are established in order to perform specific tasks, and are required to report to the General Assembly on both their performance and the results obtained. Depending on the nature of the body's work, a great deal of detailed information must be included in the report that cannot be summarized or omitted, such as: financial or statistical data, which must be presented in a set format in order to enable general readers and the parent body to evaluate it properly; deliberations leading to the formulation of legal texts; and the positions of Governments on matters of political importance.

13. In 1992, it was suggested that the Commission against Apartheid in Sports should prepare a questionnaire to assist the States Parties to the International Convention against Apartheid in Sports in implementing article 12, paragraph 1, of the Convention, concerning the submission of reports by States Parties, which should help to streamline those reports.

14. Also in 1992, in response to General Assembly resolutions encouraging bodies to relinquish their entitlement to summary records, the Economic and Social Council decided to discontinue such records for its sessional committees, as well as for some subsidiary bodies.

C. Resolutions and decisions

15. The Executive Board of UNICEF has decided that, to the extent possible, it should limit resolutions and decisions to matters directly related to its governance and policies.

D. Electronic transfer of documentation

16. In view of the increased volume and delays in the processing of documentation, and recognizing that the physical transfer of documentation is not conducive to the cost-effective and early distribution of documentation to

members, the Executive Board of UNICEF has decided to explore the possibility of the electronic transfer of documentation.

IV. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

A. Agenda

17. A limited number of major policy issues or themes for policy decision might be selected for in-depth consideration at sessions, thus permitting more focused discussion. In that regard, some bodies have provided their members with a table indicating, inter alia, the subjects, major policy issues or themes, grouped into related fields so as to achieve a logical structure, that were included in the agenda for the previous, the present and the two subsequent years with a view to eliminating those subjects that were no longer relevant and to streamlining the body's agenda further. Such bodies as the Committee on Relations with the Host Country and the Executive Board of UNICEF have also reviewed their agendas to assess the possibility of merging, combining or eliminating agenda items.

B. Method of work

18. The bureau of each body might examine all proposals and views on methods of work and organization expressed during current and previous sessions, and draw up recommendations to improve the working methods and organization for consideration at its subsequent session.

V. CONCLUSIONS

19. The Committee on Conferences should continue to play its role in informing and guiding subsidiary bodies, which in turn should maintain close contact with the Committee and seek its technical advice, so as to ensure the most efficient and effective utilization of conference resources. In addition, subsidiary bodies should be strongly encouraged to take the following measures, as applicable:

(1) Hold informal consultations, including pre-session briefings, so as to save formal meeting time, reduce the need for conference services and ensure the most efficient and effective utilization of conference resources;

(2) To the extent possible, reduce the duration of sessions, cancel scheduled meetings, with sufficient prior notice, and convene working groups in their place;

(3) Enhance efforts to improve the accuracy with which the number of fully serviced meetings is forecast;

(4) Ensure that the secretary of the body consults with delegations before the opening of the session to ascertain whether some representatives would be prepared to speak on the first substantive item at the opening meeting;

(5) Set a deadline for closing the list of speakers for each agenda item in advance of the scheduled date of consideration of the item, and cancel meetings sufficiently in advance in the event that no delegation wishes to speak;

(6) Refrain from requesting evening meetings, save in very exceptional cases;

(7) Seek to use the time not fully utilized during the consideration of a particular agenda item for the consideration of other items;

(8) Call meetings to order punctually at the scheduled time, without a quorum if necessary;

(9) Establish time-limits for speakers;

(10) Ensure compliance with the six-week rule for the distribution of documentation and the rules concerning the length of written reports;

(11) Review the list of documents requested for future meetings with a view to rationalizing it;

(12) Prepare shorter and more focused documentation;

(13) Submit the body's report on a biennial or triennial basis;

(14) Comply with the 32-page limit for reports;

(15) Review the need for summary records and relinquish the entitlement if possible;

(16) Restrict resolutions and decisions to matters directly related to governance and policies;

(17) Review the possibility of the electronic transfer of documentation;

(18) Select a limited number of major policy issues or themes for policy decision for in-depth consideration;

(19) Review the agenda to assess the possibility of merging or combining agenda items;

(20) Examine all proposals and views on methods of work and organization expressed during current and previous sessions, and draw up recommendations to improve the body's working methods and organization for consideration at its subsequent session;

(21) Ensure that the secretary of the body brings to the attention of members, as appropriate, any resolutions and decisions on the regulation of meetings and conferences, including directives on the allocation and utilization of conference resources;

(22) Ensure that the secretary of the body informs the members, at the beginning of each session, of the conference resources, including the number of meetings and the extent of interpretation services, made available to the body, and gives them a brief account, at appropriate intervals during the session, of the use they have been making of those resources.

Annex I

LETTER FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE ON CONFERENCES ADDRESSED TO THE CHAIRMEN OF ALL SUBSIDIARY BODIES

[25 March 1993]

As you are aware, two of the main concerns of the Committee on Conferences are to review the extent to which United Nations bodies make use of the conference services made available to them and to seek measures to improve the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the use of conference-servicing resources. Indeed, in operative paragraphs 11 and 12 of resolution 46/190 the General Assembly requested all subsidiary bodies to undertake informal consultations on a regular basis for the purpose of improving the utilization of their conference-servicing resources, and requested the chairmen of those bodies to report the results of the consultations to the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences, and the Secretary-General to submit to the Committee a comprehensive analysis of replies received.

In paragraph 6 of its resolution 47/202 A, the Assembly urged all subsidiary bodies to comply with the request contained in paragraph 11 of resolution 46/190. Moreover, in paragraph 7 of resolution 47/202 A, the Assembly renewed its request contained in paragraph 12 of resolution 46/190 to the chairmen of those subsidiary bodies to report the results of the consultations mentioned in paragraph 6 to the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences, and requested the Committee to carry out a comprehensive analysis of replies received. Furthermore, in paragraph 8 of resolution 47/202 A, the Assembly urged the subsidiary bodies, in the context of the required consultations mentioned in paragraph 6, to evaluate and report on the measures taken, including the convening of meetings in a timely manner, rationalizing their meeting requirements, improving the scheduling of informal consultations, the possibility of biennializing agenda items, and monitoring the timely issuance and availability of documentation.

In keeping with its abiding concern with the control and limitation of documentation, the Assembly, in paragraph 12 of resolution 47/202 B, urged subsidiary organs to review their agendas with a view to enabling the Secretariat to comply with the six-week rule, inter alia through combining agenda items and limiting requests for pre-session documentation, and requested the Secretary-General to inform the subsidiary organs of this appeal and to report orally to the Committee on Conferences on the measures taken to that effect.

In view of the foregoing requests, as well as the comprehensive analysis that the Committee on Conferences is responsible for carrying out, I should appreciate it if you could inform the Committee about the results of the consultations held for the purpose of improving the utilization of your body's conference-servicing resources; evaluate and report on the measures taken to that end; and report on the measures taken to enable the Secretariat to comply with the six-week rule.

The consultations you hold in the framework of the resolutions referred to above and the results thereof that you report to the Committee, as well as your input regarding compliance with the six-week rule, will be of considerable assistance to the Committee on Conferences when formulating recommendations to the General Assembly on these matters in future.

(Signed) Mahmoud BARIMANI

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Annex II

RESPONSE TO THE LETTER FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE ON CONFERENCES ON THE UTILIZATION OF CONFERENCE SERVICES

1. Letter from the President of the Trade and Development Board of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

[25 May 1993]

With regard to the control and limitation of documentation, the Trade and Development Board and the Working Party on the Medium-Term Plan and the Programme Budget have urged the Secretary-General of UNCTAD, in the case of pre-session documentation, to make every effort to ensure that the six-week rule is adhered to in the future. The prescribed length of reports has, for the most part, been respected. In-session documentation has been reduced to a minimum, with delegations accepting photocopied working texts in one language only. The Board has also introduced in-session informal consultations/discussions on substantive agenda items, with the participation of eminent personalities. While this measure has greatly enriched the Board's discussions, no specific basic documentation is required for these "informals", and summaries of discussions, when called for, are produced informally by the secretariat in one language only. These measures alone have greatly reduced the Board's demands on the translation and documentation processing services.

In so far as utilization of conference services is concerned, the Board has been guided by the advice of the secretariat, based on the constant consultations carried out by the Secretary of the Board with the Conference Services Division of the United Nations Office at Geneva. Pre-sessional informal briefings by the UNCTAD secretariat on substantive agenda items have greatly assisted delegations in their preparations for Board sessions - thus saving considerable formal meeting time during the session. With the full cooperation of delegations, delays in the start of meetings have been greatly reduced; statements in plenary sessions have been curtailed; evening meetings have been dispensed with (except in very exceptional cases); and all meetings have been accommodated within existing resources. Where it has been foreseen that allocated services would not be required, the Secretary of the Board has ensured that advance notice has been given to the Conference Division of UNOG, in order that those services might be deployed elsewhere. This close cooperation has resulted in considerable savings.

The Trade and Development Board and its subsidiary bodies will continue to seek ways and means to improve the utilization of conference resources.

(Signed) Gündüz AKTAN

2. Letter from the Chairman of the Legal Subcommittee of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space

[27 May 1993]

The thirty-second session of the Legal Subcommittee was held in New York from 22 March to 8 April 1993. The question of the utilization of conference resources was discussed at the very first meeting of the Subcommittee. At that meeting, the Chairman proposed, and the Subcommittee agreed, that a number of specific measures, aimed at improving the utilization of conference services and similar to those adopted in the past, should also be adopted at the session of the Subcommittee. Those measures were reflected in paragraph 13 of the Subcommittee's report (A/AC.105/544) as follows:

"(a) The Subcommittee and its working groups should begin their meetings punctually at the scheduled time, even if there was no quorum (14 members);

"(b) The Office of Conference Services should be notified as early as possible whenever it was anticipated that any of the services usually provided were not going to be required. If possible, there should be 24 hours' prior notice;

"(c) Informal consultations (i.e., outside the auspices of the Subcommittee and its working groups) should not interrupt the work of the Subcommittee or its working groups;

"(d) The general rule for annexing documents to the report of the Subcommittee should be that normally any document would be annexed, if at all, only once - to the report of the session in which it was first submitted, but not to later reports;

"(e) The Subcommittee should not have plenary meetings in the afternoons when the agenda items on nuclear power sources, on definition of outer space/geostationary orbit and on outer space benefits were considered. Instead, the working groups on these items should meet;

"(f) Delegations wishing to speak at the Subcommittee's next plenary meeting should inform the Chairman of their intention before the adjournment of the previous plenary meeting. If no such information was received by the Chairman, the next plenary meeting of the Subcommittee should be cancelled, and a working group should meet instead;

"(g) The Subcommittee and its working groups should seek to schedule in advance informal consultations at which conference services would not be used. For this purpose, the Subcommittee and its working groups should decide as early as possible whether it is feasible to cancel in advance some of their formal meetings in order to have informal consultations among interested delegations. This measure, if adopted, should not preclude resorting to unscheduled informal consultations following a decision of the Subcommittee or a working group, if such consultations are deemed necessary for attaining progress in deliberations;

"(h) The Subcommittee should seek to reduce, by one a week, the number of morning plenary meetings and to allocate the time saved for the meetings of relevant working groups. For this purpose, the Chairman should set a deadline for closing lists of speakers for the general exchange of views and for each of the substantive agenda items;

"(i) The Subcommittee and its working groups should begin their morning meetings at 10 a.m., with the understanding that this does not relate to and does not affect the question of the length of the session."

In accordance with the decision contained in General Assembly resolution 46/190, the Subcommittee undertook informal consultations for the purpose of further improving the utilization of conference-servicing resources by the Subcommittee. The results of those consultations were reflected in paragraphs 17 and 18 of the Subcommittee's report as follows:

"During those consultations, the question of the venue of the future meetings of the Legal Subcommittee was discussed. Differing points of view on the subject-matter of this question were expressed. It was observed that this matter was to be addressed by the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space. It was felt that in considering this matter it would be useful for the Committee to have a statement from the Secretariat on the financial implications of different options in the resolution of this matter, those implications being one of the factors to be taken into account.

"The question of the duration of the session and the allocation of time for consideration of the agenda items was also discussed. It was agreed that at its next session the Subcommittee, when adopting and following the schedule of work, should exercise flexibility in the allocation of time for consideration of items on its agenda. If the time provisionally allocated for the consideration of an item of its agenda is not fully used or is unlikely to be fully used, the Subcommittee should seek, on the basis of consensus, to use the time for the consideration of other items of the agenda, or, as the case may be and on the assumption that three weeks are scheduled for the Legal Subcommittee session, to consider the possibility of concluding the session ahead of the scheduled date. The adoption of this measure is without prejudice to the position of various delegations concerning the duration of the Subcommittee's sessions."

As for the six-week rule for circulation of pre-session documentation, the only such document of the Subcommittee was the provisional agenda circulated even more than six weeks before the opening of the session.

(Signed) Vaclav MIKULKA

3. Letter from the Secretary of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development

[31 May 1993]

I wish to inform you that issues such as the convening of meetings in a timely manner, the possibility of biennializing agenda items and monitoring the timely issuance and availability of documentation, referred to in paragraph 8 of resolution 47/202, have been the object of discussions, both formal and informal, at recent sessions of those subsidiary bodies.

In the context of the discussions held on those matters, one point was particularly emphasized at the recent sessions of subsidiary bodies of the Council, namely the importance for the efficient and effective conduct of business of issuing documents in time and in accordance with the provisions of Council resolutions 1979/1, 1979/69 and 1988/77. In this regard, a number of resolutions recently adopted at sessions of subsidiary bodies make recommendations on this matter. Paragraph 9 of draft resolution VI, entitled "Programme of work for 1994-1995 in the field of science and technology for development", adopted at the first session of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development (New York, 12 to 23 April)

> "Urges the Secretary-General to make every possible effort to adhere strictly to existing rules and to avoid the repetition of the regrettable experience of the late issuance of documentation for the first session of the Commission".

The special importance attached by delegations to the issue of the timely issuance and availability of documents can be summarized by the statement made by the Chairman of the Group of 77 at the opening of the first session of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development. Among other things, the Ambassador of Colombia, speaking on behalf of the Group of 77, stated:

> "We deeply regret that the consideration of the agenda items has been significantly hampered by the late presentation of documentation. It is obvious that the quality of our work is dramatically affected by this situation.
>
> "It is equally worrying that the Committee on Natural Resources and the Commission on Transnational Corporations have experienced a similar delay in documentation. We wonder about the sense of the theoretical debate about the reform in the economic and social sectors when we find unjustified obstacles for its operation at the level of basic administrative arrangements. At the same time, we wonder if this trend of documentation delay is due to the lack of efficiency of the Administration or to some kind of intentionality."

With regard to the improvement of the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the use of conference-servicing resources for the United Nations Pledging Conference for Development Activities, I would like to point out that the

General Assembly in its resolution 45/215 dealt with that issue in a very effective manner, and the implementation of the recommendations contained therein have significantly simplified and improved the methods of work and shortened the length of the Conference.

(Signed) Alexandre DE BARROS

4. Letter from the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People

[7 June 1993]

I would like to inform you that the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, in cooperation with the Division for Palestinian Rights of the United Nations Secretariat, has consistently endeavoured to achieve the most efficient utilization of conference-servicing resources in carrying out its programme of meetings, seminars and activities for NGOs. To the extent possible, efforts have also continued to be made to ensure the timely and orderly submission of its pre-session documentation.

(Signed) Keba Birane CISSE

5. Letters from the Secretary of the Special Committee against Apartheid, the Intergovernmental Group to Monitor the Supply and Shipping of Oil and Petroleum Products to South Africa, the Meeting of the States Parties to the International Convention against Apartheid in Sports and the Commission against Apartheid in Sports

[11 June 1993]

In the previous year as well as this year, the Centre [Against Apartheid] has exerted efforts to rationalize its work by streamlining the documentation of the United Nations bodies serviced by it, resorting more frequently to informal meetings of these bodies. The official meetings were even cut to the minimum essential to provide the needed services of these bodies, as indicated below:

(a) Special Committee against Apartheid

The report of the Special Committee, which was presented to the General Assembly at its forty-seventh session, was streamlined, and it is hoped that this year this same trend of improvement will continue. The Special Committee resorted more frequently to discuss questions before it through its Bureau and Working Group. Both these bodies function without conference services. During the observance of the International Days, in previous years the Special Committee held two meetings - the first, the official observance and the second, a round-table discussion. This year, the Special Committee, for example, held an official observance of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and the round-table discussion was held at Columbia University, without United Nations conference services.

(b) Intergovernmental Group to Monitor the Supply and Shipping of Oil and Petroleum Products to South Africa

The Group's programme includes two official meetings (with conference services - without summary records). The first was held to elect the Bureau; the second will be held at the end of the year to approve its report to the General Assembly. However, there were seven informal meetings of the Group and two meetings of its drafting group in 1992. The report is already streamlined and it is expected to be adopted before the beginning of the session of the General Assembly.

(c) Meeting of the States Parties to the International Convention against Apartheid in Sports

The States Parties to the International Convention against Apartheid in Sports are expected to meet once a year. If they fail to finish their business in one meeting, there is a resumed session, as was the case last year. However, in order to avoid repeatedly resorting to official meetings and services, the Secretariat suggested last year that the States Parties hold informal meetings to resolve the questions of disagreement between the States Parties. As for the documentation of the meeting, they are of a technical nature and very concise.

(d) Commission against Apartheid in Sports

When the Commission initially began its work, it was planning to convene for five working days. At the proposal of the Secretariat, the Commission agreed to reduce the days of the meetings to four days and later to three days. Last year, attempts were made to utilize the time of the meetings to the utmost. The first meeting was always informal to agree on issues regarding the organization of work and other matters of concern to the Commission which should be resolved in private meetings.

As for the pre-session documentation of the Commission, the secretariat, under the guidance of the Chairman of the Commission, has always tried to limit such documentation to the essentially required number of documents to service the meetings of the Commission. It was suggested last year that the Commission prepare a questionnaire to assist the States Parties in implementing article 12, paragraph 1, of the Convention concerning the submission of the reports of the States Parties. It is hoped that through this procedure the document will be streamlined and serve the purposes of the Commission.

(Signed) Amer ARAIM

6. Letter from the Chairman of the Executive Board of the United Nations Children's Fund

[25 June 1993]

There has been, and continues to be, an ongoing commitment by the UNICEF Executive Board and its secretariat to improve the working procedures of the Executive Board.

A summary of the measures taken to date and those planned is contained in the document entitled "Future work and procedures of the Executive Board" (E/ICEF/1993/CRP.5) and in Executive Board decision 1993/2 of the same name. Please note in particular paragraph 2 of the latter document in which our efforts to focus the agenda on two major policy issues per annual session are a reality for next year. In addition, the table indicating subjects for discussion over a four-year period is a practical way to encourage biennializing, triennializing, etc., subjects of discussion at the Board (see E/ICEF/1993/CRP.9 and Rev.1).

As you will observe, the UNICEF Executive Board is committed to reducing both the volume of documentation and the scope of the agenda of its annual sessions. In response to requests from the Board, the secretariat has clustered topics for discussion under one agenda item whenever possible and produces a consolidated list of all requests emanating from Board meetings. Unfortunately, members continue to request too many reports. The Executive Board, with guidance from the Bureau, will continue its efforts to significantly reduce the volume of documentation which, again in 1993, exceeded 2,000 pages.

I have noted that this year the Office of Conference Services was unable to meet UNICEF's needs. For example, of some 43 documents submitted by UNICEF in January and February for processing at the United Nations, only one was issued in all languages six weeks prior to the 1993 Executive Board session. In addition to objections voiced over the delay in receipt of documents in language versions, a number of francophone delegations complained about the quality of French translation. I fully recognize that this was due to the vastly greater burden on the Office of Conference Services generated by an unprecedented number of unexpected meetings of the Security Council and other organs - a situation compounded by the downsizing of the United Nations system, including a reduction in the number of translators at a time when their services were increasingly in demand. I would hope that this situation is a transitory one and that the editorial and translation capacity of the Office of Conference Services will be strengthened in future.

Another area I would like to highlight is the Board's desire to pursue the possibility of access to the United Nations database to retrieve Board documentation. According to the United Nations Secretariat, this is now possible for Permanent Missions in New York and Geneva, and offers tremendous possibilities for decreasing the costs of printing and mailing hard copies. This is not common knowledge among the Permanent Missions and agencies and all relevant United Nations organizations and their governing bodies. I attach for your information a copy of a reporting telex from Canada on this topic.

In closing, I wish to assure you of the Executive Board's commitment to continue its efforts to streamline its work and procedures and to rationalize its demands upon the Secretariat of the United Nations and of UNICEF alike.

(Signed) Frederick WARD

7. Letter from the Chairman of the Committee on Relations with the Host Country

[6 July 1993]

The Bureau of the Committee on Relations with the Host Country has discussed extensively the issues referred to in your letter. The Bureau was of the view that the Committee uses conference-servicing resources in an effective and efficient manner. Meetings of the Committee are convened normally in a timely fashion. There have been in the past, however, several occasions when the Committee was required to postpone its scheduled meetings, on short notice, at the request of the Department of Conference Services. This happened mainly because the Security Council or its Committees were holding their meetings and because the Committee on Relations with the Host Country is assigned the same team of interpreters which services the Security Council and its Committees. Therefore, it would seem advisable, if possible, for this Committee to be assigned a different team of interpreters.

The Bureau also discussed the question of the rationalization of the Committee's agenda, which is now comprised of standard items adopted by the Committee in 1982. It was agreed that the Chairman would encourage the members of the Committee to contact him or the Secretary of the Committee prior to any scheduled meeting on any items they would like to raise or address at this meeting and, if possible, submit any relevant documentation or written statements in advance of such a meeting. This would enable the Committee to discuss items brought to its attention in an effective and businesslike manner, as well as for the host country representatives to be better prepared to answer specific issues raised by the members of the Committee. It was also felt that one item, the establishment of a commissary at United Nations Headquarters, be dropped from its standard agenda.

(Signed) A. J. JACOVIDES